The Younger Set

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS,

Author of "The Fighting Chance," Etc.

Even if he had done what she heard Rosamund Fane say he had done it had remained meaningless to her save for the manner of the telling. But now; but now! Why had they laughed? Why had their attitudes and manner and the disconnected phrases in French left her flushed and rigid among the idle group at supper? Why had they suddenly seemed to remember her presence and express their abrupt consciousness of it in such furtive signals and silence?

It was false anyway, whatever it meant. And, anyway, it was false that he had driven away in Mrs. Ruthven's brougham. But, oh, if he had only stayed, if he had only remained—this friend of hers who had been so nice to her from the moment he came into her life, so generous, so considerate, so lovely to her and to Gerald!

For a moment the glow remained; then a chill doubt crept in. Would he have remained had he known she was to be there? Where did he go after the dinner? As for what they said, it was absurd. And yet and yet—


He sat, savagely intent upon the waning fire.

He sat, savagely intent upon the waning fire; she turned restlessly again, elbows close together on her knees, face framed in her hands.

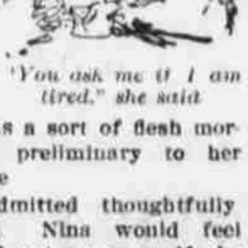
"You ask me if I am tired," she said. "I am—of the froth of life."

His face changed instantly. "What?" he exclaimed, laughing.

But she, very young and seriously intent, was now wrestling with the mighty platitudes of youth. First of all she desired to know what meaning life held for humanity. Then she expressed a doubt as to the necessity for human happiness, duty being her discovery as sufficient substitute.

But he heard in her childish babble the minor murmur of an undercurrent quickening for the first time, and he listened patiently and answered gravely, touched by her irremediable loneliness.

So when she said that she was tired of gayety, that she would like to study, he said that he would take up anything she chose with her. And when she spoke vaguely of a life devoted to good works—of the wiser charity, of being morally equipped to aid those who required material aid—he was very serious, but ventured to suggest that she dance her first season through as a sort of flesh mortifying penance preliminary to her spiritual novitiate.


"You ask me if I am tired," she said.

"Yes," she admitted thoughtfully. "You are right. Nina would feel dreadful if I did not go on or if she imagined I cared so little for it all. But one season is enough to waste. Don't you think so?"

"Quite enough," he assured her.

"And—why should I ever marry?" she demanded, lifting her clear, sweet eyes to his.

"Why, indeed?" he repeated, with conviction. "I can see no reason."

"I am glad you understand me," she said. "I am not a marrying woman."

"Not at all," he assured her.

"No, I am not, and Nina—the darling—doesn't understand. Why, what do you suppose? But would it be a breach of confidence to anybody if I told you?"

"I doubt it," he said. "What is it you have to tell me?"

"Only—it's very, very silly—only several men—and one nice enough to know better—Sudbury Gray"—

"Asked you to marry them?" he finished, nodding his head at the cat.

"Yes," she admitted, frankly astonished. "But how did you know?"

"Inferred it. Go on."

"There is nothing more," she said without embarrassment. "I told Nina each time, but she confused me by asking for details, and the details were too foolish and too annoying to repeat. I do not wish to marry anybody. I think I made that very plain to everybody."

"Right, as usual," he said cheerfully. "You are too intelligent to consider that sort of thing just now."

"You do understand me, don't you?" she said gratefully. "There are so many serious things in life to learn and to think of, and that is the very last thing I should ever consider. I am very, very glad I had this talk with you. Now I am rested, and I shall retire for a good long sleep."

With which paradox she stood up, stifling a tiny yawn, and looked smilingly at him, all the old sweet confidence in her eyes. Then, suddenly mocking:

"Who suggested that you call me by my first name?" she asked.

"Some good angel or other. May I?"

"If you please. I rather like it. But I couldn't very well call you anything except 'Captain Selwyn.'"

"On account of my age?"

"Your age!" contemptuous in her confident equality.

"Oh, my wisdom then? You probably reverence me too deeply."

"Probably not. I don't know. I couldn't do it somehow"—

"Try it—unless you're afraid."

"I'm not afraid!"

"Yes, you are, if you don't take a dare."

"You dare me?"

"I do."

"Philip," she said, hesitating, adorable in her embarrassment. "No. No. No. I can't do it that way in cold blood. It's got to be 'Captain Selwyn,' for awhile anyway. Good night."

He took her outstretched hand, laughing. The usual little friendly shake followed. Then she turned gayly away, leaving him standing before the whitening ashes.

He thought the fire was dead, but when he turned out the lamp an hour later under the ashes embers glowed in the darkness of the winter morning.

Chapter 7

"MID-LENT, and the enemy grins," remarked Selwyn as he started for church with Nina and the children. Austin, knee deep in a dozen Sunday supplements, refused to stir. Poor little Eileen was now convalescent from grip, but still unsteady on her legs. Her maid had taken the grip.

Boots Lansing called to see Eileen, but she wouldn't come down, saying her nose was too pink. Drina entertained Boots, and then Selwyn returned and talked army talk with him until tea was served. Drina poured tea very prettily. Nina had driven Austin to vespers. The family dined at 7 so Drina could sit up; special treat on account of Boots' presence at table. Gerald was expected, but did not come.


Drina poured tea very prettily.

The next morning Selwyn went downtown at the usual hour and found Gerald, pale and shaky, hanging over his desk and trying to dictate letters to an uncomfortable stenographer.

So he dismissed the abashed girl for the moment, closed the door and sat down beside the young man.

"Go home, Gerald," he said with decision. "When Neergard comes in I'll tell him you are not well. And, old fellow, don't ever come near the office again when you're in this condition."

"I'm a perfect fool," faltered the boy, his voice trembling. "I don't really care for that sort of thing, either. But you know how it is in that set"—

"What set?"

"Oh, the Fanes, the Ruth"— He stammered himself into silence.

"I see. What happened last night?"

"The usual, two tables full of it. There was a wheel too. I had no intention— But you know yourself how it parches your throat—the jollying and laughing and excitement. I forgot all about what you—what we talked over. I'm ashamed and sorry, but I can stay here and attend to things, of course"—

"I don't want Neergard to see you," repeated Selwyn.

"W-why," stammered the boy, "do I look as rocky as that?"

"Yes. See here, you are not afraid of me, are you?"

"No"—

"You don't think I'm one of those long faced, blue nosed butters-in, do you? You have confidence in me, haven't you? You know I'm an average and normally sinful man who has made plenty of mistakes and who understands how others make them. You know that, don't you, old chap?"

"Y-es."

"Then you will listen, won't you, Gerald?"

The boy laid his arms on the desk and hid his face in them. Then he nodded.

For ten minutes Selwyn talked to him with all the terse and colloquial confidence of a comradeship founded upon respect for mutual fallibility—no instruction, no admonition, no blame, no reproach, only an affectionately logical review of matters as they stood and as they threatened to stand.

The boy fortunately was still pliable and susceptible, still unalarmed and frank. It seemed that he had lost money again, this time to Jack Ruthven, and Selwyn's teeth remained sternly interlocked as bit by bit the story came out, but in the telling the boy was not quite as frank as he might have been, and Selwyn supposed he was able to stand his loss without seeking aid.

"Anyway," said Gerald in a muffled voice, "I've learned one lesson—that a business man can't acquire the habits and keep the infernal hours that suit people who can take all day to sleep it off."

"Right," said Selwyn.

"Besides, my income can't stand it," added Gerald naively.

"Neither could mine, old fellow. And, Gerald, cut out this card business.


"Grip?" he asked.

It's the final refuge of the feeble minded. You like it? Oh, well, if you've got to play. If you've no better resource for leisure, and if nonparticipation isolates you too completely from other idiots, play the imbecile gentleman's game, which means a game where nobody need worry over the stakes."

"But—they'd laugh at me!"

"I know. But Boots Lansing would not, and you have considerable respect for him."

Gerald nodded. He had immediately succumbed to Lansing like everybody else.

"And one thing more," said Selwyn. "Don't play for stakes, no matter how insignificant—where women sit in the game. Fashionable or not, it is rotten sport, whatever the ethics may be. And, Gerald, tainted sport and a clean record can't take the same fence together."

A little later the boy started for home at Selwyn's advice. But the memory of his card losses frightened him, and he stopped on the way to see what money Austin would advance him.

Julius Neergard came up from Long Island, arriving at the office about noon. The weather was evidently cold on Long Island. He had the complexion of a raw ham, but the thick, fat hand, with its bitten nails, which he offered Selwyn as he entered his office, was unpleasantly hot, and on the thin nose, which split the broad expanse of face, a bead or two of sweat usually glistened, winter and summer.

"Where's Gerald?" he asked as an office boy relieved him of his heavy box coat and brought his mail to him.

"I advised Gerald to go home," observed Selwyn carelessly. "He is not perfectly well."

Neergard's tiny, mouselike eyes, set close together, stole brightly in Selwyn's direction, but they usually looked just a little past a man, seldom at him.

"Grip?" he asked.

"I don't think so," said Selwyn.

"Lots of grip round town," observed Neergard, as though satisfied that Gerald had it. Then he sat down and rubbed his large, membraneous ears.

"Captain Selwyn," he began, "I'm satisfied that it's a devilish good thing."

"Are you?"

"Emphatically. I've mastered the details, virtually all of 'em. Here's the situation in a grain of wheat. The Slowitha club owns a thousand or so acres of oak, scrub, pine scrub, sand and weeds and controls 4,000 more—that is to say, the club pays the farmers' rents and fixes their fences and awards them odd jobs and prizes for the farm sustaining the biggest number of bevies; also the club pays them to maintain millet and buckwheat patches and to act as wardens. In return the farmers post their 4,000 acres for the exclusive benefit of the club. Is that plain?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, then. Now, the Slowitha is largely composed of very rich men, among them Bradley Harmon, Jack


Eileen.

Ruthven, George Fane, Sanxon Orchil, the Hon. Delmour-Carnes—that crowd—rich and stingy. That's why they are contented with a yearly agreement with the farmers instead of buying the 4,000 acres. Why put a lot of good money out of commission when they can draw interest on it and toss an insignificant fraction of that interest as a sop to the farmers? Do you see? That's your millionaire method, and it's what makes 'em in the first place."

He drew a large, fancy handkerchief from his pistol pocket and wiped the beads from the bridge of his limber nose. But they reappeared again.

"Now," he said, "I am satisfied that, working very carefully, we can secure options on every acre of the four thousand. There is money in it either way and any way we work it. We get it coming and going. First of all, if the Slowitha people find that they really cannot get on without controlling these acres, why"—and he snickered so that his nose curved into a thin, ruddy beak—"why, captain, I suppose we could let them have the land. Eh? Oh, yes, if they must have it!"

Selwyn frowned slightly.

"But the point is," continued Neergard, "that it borders the railroad on the north, and where the land is not wavy it's flat as a pancake, and"—he sank his husky voice—"it's fairly riddled with water. I paid a thousand dollars for six tests."

"Water!" repeated Selwyn wonderingly. "Why, it's dry as a desert!"

"Underground water—only about forty feet on the average. Why, man, I can hit a well flowing 3,000 gallons almost anywhere. It's a gold mine. I don't care what you do with the acreage—split it up into lots and advertise or club the Slowitha people into submission, it's all the same; it's a gold mine, to be swiged and developed. Now there remain the title searching and the job of financing it, because we've got to move cautiously and knock softly at the doors of the money vaults, or we'll be waking up some Wall street relatives or secret business associates of the yellow crowd, and if anybody howls for help we'll be up in the air next New Year's and still hitting skyward."

He stood up, gathering together the mail matter which his secretary had already opened for his attention. "There's plenty of time yet. Their leases were renewed the first of this year, and they'll run the year out. But it's something to think about. Will you talk to Gerald, or shall I?"

"You," said Selwyn. "I'll think the matter over and give you my opinion. May I speak to my brother-in-law about it?"

Neergard turned in his tracks and looked almost at him.

"Do you think there's any chance of his financing the thing?"

"I haven't the slightest idea of what he might do, especially"—he hesitated—"as you never have had any loans from his people, I understand."

"No," said Neergard, "I haven't."

"It's rather out of their usual, I believe."

"So they say. But Long Island acreage needn't beg favors now. That's


Draymore.

all over, Captain Selwyn. Fane, Harmon & Co know that. Mr Gerard ought to know it too."

Selwyn looked troubled. "Shall I consult Mr Gerard?" he repeated. "I should like to if you have no objection."

Neergard's small, close set eyes were focused on a spot just beyond Selwyn's left shoulder.

"Suppose you sound him," he suggested, "in strictest"—

"Naturally," cut in Selwyn dryly and, turning to his littered desk, opened the first letter his hand encountered. Now that his head was turned, Neergard looked full at the back of his neck for a long minute, then went out silently.

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That night Selwyn stopped at his sister's house before going to his own rooms and, finding Austin alone in the library, laid the matter before him exactly as Neergard had put it.

"You see," he added, "that I'm a sort of ass about business methods. This furtive pouncing on a thing and clubbing other people's money out of them with it—this slyly acquiring land that is necessary to an unsuspecting neighbor and then holding him up—I don't like. There's always something of this sort that prevents my cordial co-operation with Neergard—always something in the schemes which hints of—of squeezing—of something underground."

"Like the water which he's going to squeeze out of the wells?"

Selwyn laughed.

"Phil," said his brother-in-law, "if you think anybody can do a profitable business except at other people's expense you are an ass."

"Am I?" asked Selwyn, still laughing frankly.

"Certainly. The land is there plain enough for anybody to see. It's always been there. It's likely to remain for a few eons, I fancy.

"Now, along comes Meynheer Julius Neergard, the only man who seems to have brains enough to see the present value of that parcel to the Slowitha people. Everybody else had the same chance. Nobody except Neergard knew enough to take it. Why shouldn't he profit by it?"

"Yes, but if he'd be satisfied to cut it up into lots and do what is fair"—

"Cut it up into nothing! Man alive, do you suppose that Slowitha people would let him? They've only a few thousand acres. They've got to control that land. What good is their club without it? Do you imagine they'd let a town grow up on three sides of their precious game preserve? And besides, I'll bet you that half of their streams and lakes take rise on other people's property and that Neergard knows it—the Dutch fox!"

They discussed Neergard's scheme for a little while longer. Austin,


They discussed Neergard's scheme.

shrewd and cautious, declined any personal part in the financing of the deal, although he admitted the probability of prospective profits.

"Our investments and our loans are of a different character," he explained, "but I have no doubt that Fane, Harmon & Co."—

"Why, both Fane and Harmon are members of the club," laughed Selwyn. "You don't expect Neergard to go to them?"

A peculiar expression flickered in Gerard's heavy features. Perhaps he thought that Fane and Harmon and Jack Ruthven were not above exploiting their own club under certain circumstances; but, whatever his opinion, he said nothing further and, suggesting that Selwyn remain to dine, went off to dress.

A few moments later he returned crestfallen and conciliatory.

"I forgot Nina and I are dining at the Orchils. Come up a moment. She wants to speak to you."

So they took the rose tinted rococo elevator. Austin went away to his own quarters, and Selwyn tapped at Nina's boudoir.

"Is that you, Phil? One minute. Watson is finishing my hair. Come in now and kindly keep your distance, my friend. Do you suppose I want Rosamund to know what brand of war paint I use?"

"Rosamund?" he repeated, with a good humored shrug. "It's likely, isn't it?"

"Certainly it's likely. You'd never know you were telling her anything, but she'd extract every detail in ten seconds. I understand she adores you, Phil. Eileen is furious at being left here all alone. She's practically well, and she's to dine with Drina in the library. Would you be good enough to dine there with them? Eileen, poor child, is heartily sick of her imprisonment. It would be a mercy, Phil."


"Is that you, Phil?"

"Why, yes, I'll do it, of course, only I've some matters at home"—

"Home! You call those stuffy, smoky, impossible, half furnished rooms home! Phil, when are you ever going to get some pretty furniture and art things? Eileen and I have been talking it over, and we've decided to go there and see what you need and then order it, whether you like it or not."

"Thanks," he said, laughing. "It's just what I've tried to avoid. I've got things where I want them now, but I knew it was too comfortable to last. Boots said that some woman would be sure to be good to me with an art nouveau rocking chair."

"A perfect sample of man's gratitude," said Nina, exasperated, "for I've ordered two beautiful art nouveau rocking chairs, one for you and one for Mr. Lansing. Now you can go and humiliate poor little Eileen, who took so much pleasure in planning with me for your comfort. As for your friend Boots, he's unspeakable—with my compliments."

Selwyn stayed until he made peace with his sister, then he mounted to the nursery to "lean over" the younger children and preside at prayers. This being accomplished, he descended to the library, where Eileen Erroll in a filmy, lace clouded gown, full of turquoise tints, reclined with her arm around Drina amid heaps of cushions, watching the waitress prepare a table for two.

He took the fresh, cool hand she extended and sat down on the edge of her couch.

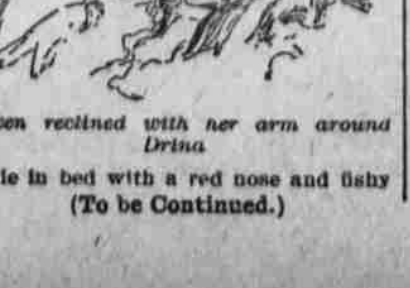
"All O. K. again?" he inquired, retaining Eileen's hand in his.

"Thank you—quite. Are you really going to dine with us? Are you sure you want to? Oh, I know you've given up some very gay dinner somewhere"—

"I was going to dine with Boots when Nina rescued me. Poor Boots! I think I'll telephone"—

"Telephone him to come here!" begged Drina. "Would he come? Oh please—I'd love to have him."

"I wish you would ask him," said Eileen; "it's been so lonely and stupid


Eileen reclined with her arm around Drina

to lie in bed with a red nose and fishy

(To be Continued.)

"Aeroscaphe" has been coined as the word that signifies aeroplane with philological correctness.

"She says she is not a woman to marry anybody."

"I think she fully demonstrated that. Three of her ex-husbands pay excellent alimony, and even the fourth pays something, I understand."—Pittsburg Post.

A quadrangular screen, which opens or closes as a door to which it is attached at the top, is opened or closed, invented by a Kansan, is said to prevent flies and other insects from entering a house.

Johnny—The camel can go eight days without water.

Freddy—So could I if ma would let me.—Harper's Bazaar.

Camphor oil is manufactured by Paree merchants. At Foochow, China, they control 17 distilleries, and export most of the produce to India.

He—Would you like to take a spin with me on the bridle path.

She—Church or Park?—Pick-Me-Up.

A German traveling in Brazil says that there are kinds of coffee there which, as prepared by the natives, are as superior to ordinary coffee as champaign is to ordinary wine.

Notice of Appointment

Estate of Alfred Roberts deceased.

The undersigned have been appointed and qualified as executors of the estate of Alfred Roberts, late of Highland County, Ohio, deceased.

Dated this 28th day of January A. D. 1909.

RILDA ROBERTS,
LOUIE E. RUBLE.